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ABSTRACT

This report examines outcomes of the Primary Language Record (PLR), a program for systematically observing students in various aspects of their literacy development. The PLR uses classroom events and samples of student work to record students' progress and interests, recommend strategies for addressing needs and building on talents, and discuss ideas and perceptions with students, their parents, and faculty. This report examines the PLR in New York City's Public School 261, which has participated in this project since its inception in 1991. The following topics are covered: (1) concerns about standardized testing; (2) a general overview of the PLR; (3) a description of the PLR as implemented in P.S. 261; (4) the influence of PLR on teaching, learning, and assessment; and (5) lessons for implementing the PLR. Appendices include suggested parent interview questions; suggested student interview questions; PLR forms for observations; and work samples. (MN)

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The Primary Language Record at P.S. 261: How Assessment Transforms Teaching and Learning

Beverly Falk
Linda Darling-Hammond

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March 1993

Preface

This study of the *Primary Language Record* (PLR) at P.S. 261 examines the outcomes of one of the initiatives of the Accountability Project, a collaboration between the New York City Public Schools Office for Research, Evaluation, and Assessment and the Fund for New York City Public Education. This collaboration has supported the development of a number of alternatives to standardized testing in over 50 New York City public schools. P.S. 261, in Brooklyn's Community School District 15, has participated in this project since its inception. Its introduction of the PLR throughout the school has involved teachers, administrators, families, and students in documenting and examining the way children learn. This study looks at the impact of these authentic assessment practices on classrooms, on teaching, on home/school relations, on professional development structures and formats, on the work of students, and on the views of participants. It seeks to understand how using the PLR changes these aspects of school life, and it explores the conditions needed to support those changes.

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This initiative to launch the ***Primary Language Record*** in the New York City Public Schools was made possible by the Accountability Project, a collaboration between the New York City Public Schools Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (OREA) and the Fund for New York City Public Education. Special thanks to John Schoener and Maureen Houtrides from OREA and Janet Price from the Fund.

The New York Assessment Network, supported by funds from the Aaron Diamond Foundation, has also contributed to the implementation of this project. Thanks to its member organizations -- OREA, the Fund, the Center for Educational Options, the Center for Collaborative Education, and the Elementary Teachers Network -- for their continuing support to teachers in schools, their sharing of information and resources, and their efforts to collaboratively explore issues and problems. We are especially indebted to Jane Spielman and Suzanne Marten from the Center for Educational Options for providing us with additional information and insights on students' work.

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Chapter 1
Concerns about Standardized Testing: The Need for Alternatives

Linda[1] was a first grader, initially characterized by her teacher as an "extremely slow" learner with "reading problems." The teacher's view of Linda began to change, however, after she worked with her in a literature-based reading program supported by careful observation using the *Primary Language Record* (PLR) (Barrs, Ellis, Hester, and Thomas, 1988). Based on her assessment of Linda's needs and interests, the teacher read regularly with Linda individually, using "real" books featuring lots of repetition and poetry.

One of Linda's favorite books was ***The Monster's Party*** (Cowley, 1983). She read it over and over again, approximating the text by using the pictures, her own sense of the story's meaning, and her memory of previous readings. Linda's teacher gave her support by praising her as a reader, encouraging lots of contextual guesses, and giving her clues when she was stumped.

After many reading sessions in which they worked on developing multiple strategies for getting at the meaning of print, Linda's teacher asked her if she wanted to make her own book based on ***The Monster's Party*** format. Linda was delighted. She titled it *A Little Girl's Party* and in it modeled the language pattern of the original book. Linda chose and dictated to her teacher what the girl could do, drew pictures to give herself the needed clues, and finally read it aloud to a smiling and appreciative class audience:

> She can dance
> That's what she can do.
>
> She can jump.
> That's what she can do.
>
> She can skip.
> That's what she can do.
>
> SHE CAN READ!
> That's what she can do.

Across the country, educators, parents, and policy makers are pressing for changes in

---

[1] Children's names have been changed throughout this report.

the ways that schools evaluate student learning. Persuaded that traditional standardized tests fail to measure many important aspects of learning and do not support the most useful strategies for teaching, practitioners are introducing alternative approaches to assessment into classrooms -- approaches that help teachers look more carefully and closely at students, their learning, and their work.

New York City, like other districts across the country, is actively engaged in exploring and developing alternatives to traditional tests. Individual schools, community school districts, and the New York City Office for Research, Evaluation, and Assessment have all been developing and testing alternatives, seeking to invent and support schoolwide and classroom options. These include performance-based assessments in a variety of subject areas, portfolio assessments, and strategies to support teachers' observation of students. The *Primary Language Record*, developed in England and increasingly used in the United States, is one example of a support for teachers' observations of student learning.

This is a study about how the use of the *Primary Language Record* has influenced teaching and learning in one New York City public elementary school. It is an authentic assessment tool for observing and analyzing young children's literacy development that involves parents, students, and teachers in documenting what children know and can do. The study examines classroom practices, professional development structures and formats, the work of students, and the views of teachers, administrators, families, and children who attend P.S. 261 in Brooklyn's Community School District 15. It seeks an understanding at close hand of how the PLR operates in practice and how it can provide better information about student performance for teachers, parents, and the school system. The study also examines the broader benefits the PLR offers children, teachers, parents, and administrators as it supports teaching, home and school relations, and schoolwide communications about teaching, learning, and children. Finally, the study explores the conditions and practices needed to support the use of this kind of assessment.

Observations, interviews, and an examination of student work and school documents reveal that use of the *Primary Language Record* has contributed to the development of a culture of professional growth and inquiry at P.S. 261 and has enriched the way teachers view children and their families. The result is better information about student learning and progress, more supportive teaching practices for students, more respect for students' families and cultures, greater family involvement in the learning process, and an increased sense of professionalism among teachers. Through the story of P.S. 261, this report portrays how a change in the assessment practices of a school can promote a more responsive and responsible environment for teaching and learning.

Limitations of Standardized Tests

Schools in New York City and New York State administer a wide array of standardized tests to children of all ages and grades. These are used to determine readiness for school and placement in grade and class levels; to assess academic achievement levels and place students in different programs, groups, or tracks; and to diagnose potential learning problems. There is widespread dissatisfaction, however, with the nature and uses of these tests, not just in New York but across the country. A recent report by the New York Public Interest Research Group raised increasingly common criticisms of standardized tests, noting the narrowness of what they measure, their lack of accuracy for decision making, and their lack of useful diagnostic information for teaching (Harris and Sammons, 1989). Among the problems identified with widespread use of standardized tests are the following:

The nature and format of many standardized tests limit what they can measure. Multiple-choice tests do not evaluate student performance on actual tasks, such as reading, writing, or problem solving in various subject areas, and they are poor measures of higher order thinking skills. These kinds of tests place students in a passive, reactive mode, requiring that they respond to predetermined problems by recognizing a single answer, rather than producing their own products and wrestling with complex, ambiguous problems (National Research Council [NRC], 1982). Because each question contains only one correct answer, these tests reward the ability to think quickly and superficially (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 1981). They do not measure the ability to think deeply, to create, or to perform in any field. They are unable to measure students' abilities to write coherently and persuasively, to use mathematics in the context of real-life problems, to make meaning from text when reading, to understand and use scientific methods or reasoning, or to grasp and apply social science concepts (Darling-Hammond, 1991; Medina and Neill, 1988).

Most traditional standardized tests do not reflect current understandings of how students learn. They are based on an outmoded theory of learning as the accumulation and recall of isolated facts and skills. They do not reflect present knowledge that people learn in meaningful and purposeful contexts by connecting what they already know with what they are trying to learn (Gardner, 1983; Kantrowitz and Wingert, 1989; Resnick, 1987). Thus, thinking skills are the foundation for building "basic" skills, not the other way around, as many testing programs assume. Furthermore, real skills must be demonstrated in complex performance contexts, not on tasks demanding only recognition of discrete facts. By focusing on rote skills rather than conceptual learning, the tests often miss the forest for the trees.

Overuse of such tests narrows the curriculum and restricts teachers' instructional approaches. Because test scores are used for so many different purposes, they often exert great influence on what is taught, leading to a narrowed curriculum. The pressures of time

and content-coverage demands often lead teachers to teach only what is tested, and to teach these things in the particular forms and formats used by the tests. This leads to an overemphasis on superficial content coverage and rote drill on discrete skills, at the expense of in-depth projects and other thought-provoking tasks that take more time. It also leads to classwork in which students spend their time on testlike tasks such as answering multiple choice or fill-in-the-blanks questions, rather than more challenging types of work, like writing essays, conducting research, experimenting, reading and discussing literature, debating, solving difficult problems, and creating products (Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; Darling-Hammond and Wise, 1985; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1988; Kantrowitz and Wingert, 1989; Darling-Hammond, 1990, 1991).

Standardized tests are poor diagnostic tools. Because most traditional standardized tests provide only a limited measure of a narrow aspect of learning or development, they are poor predictors of how students will perform in other settings, and they are unable to provide information about why students score as they do. Because they report only numerical scores, mass-administered standardized tests do not provide information about how children tackle different tasks or what abilities they rely on in their problem solving. This promotes a view of children as having deficits that need to be remediated rather than as having individual differences and strengths that can be supported and developed. It also fails to provide enough information about areas of difficulty to inform instructional strategies for addressing them (NAEYC, 1988; Bradekamp and Shepard, 1989).

An additional factor contributing to the inadequacies of standardized tests for diagnostic and placement purposes is that they do not reflect or capture the diversity of students' backgrounds and experiences. Because they often contain assumptions and facts that are grounded in the context of the dominant culture -- and fail to include relevant forms of knowledge from other cultures -- these tests place students from nondominant cultures at a disadvantage in demonstrating what they know and can do (Medina and Neill, 1988). This leads to consistent inaccuracies in identification of students for special education and remedial education. These placements then tend to further limit the curriculum to which students are exposed (Oakes, 1985; Darling-Hammond, 1991).

Alternative Assessment Practices

Many educators and researchers have sought to overcome the problems of standardized testing by developing alternative assessment practices that look directly at students' work and performances in ways that can evaluate what they understand and can do, as well as how they think and learn. These alternatives are frequently called "authentic" assessments because they engage students in real-world tasks that more closely resemble those that occur in the real world and evaluate them according to criteria that are important

for actual performance in the field (Wiggins, 1989). Such assessments include oral presentations or performances along with collections of students' written products and their solutions to problems, experiments, debates, and inquiries (Archbald and Newman, 1988). They also include teacher observations and inventories of individual students' work and behavior as well as of cooperative group projects (NAEYC, 1988).

These kinds of assessment practices directly measure actual performance. They are intended to provide a broad range of continuous, qualitative data that can be used by teachers to inform and shape instruction. They aim to evaluate students' abilities and performances more fully and accurately and to provide teachers with information that helps them develop teaching strategies geared to the real needs of individual children.

Keeping track of student growth and development in these authentic ways enhances professional development by encouraging teachers to think more deeply about their teaching, its objectives, methods, and results. Because students are involved in developing, exhibiting, and evaluating their own work, such evaluation also helps them to develop a sense of responsibility and ownership of their work and encourages them to analyze and reflect regularly on their progress. Authentic evaluation encourages an intelligent, rich curriculum rather than the narrowed one fostered by teaching to multiple-choice tests. It provides the opportunity for assessment to be directly aligned with educational values, goals, and practices.

The *Primary Language Record* accomplishes many of these goals for assessment while overcoming a number of the problems of traditional standardized testing. How it does so and what supports are needed to use it effectively are the topics of the remainder of this report.

Chapter 2
The *Primary Language Record*

The *Primary Language Record* (Barrs *et al*, 1988) was conceived in 1985 by educators in England who were searching for a better means of recording children's literacy progress during the elementary school grades. Teachers, school heads, staff developers, and central office representatives developed it together as a way of reflecting and supporting good teaching practices. It is designed to meet the following criteria for good assessment:

- Assessment practices should support and inform day-to-day teaching in the classroom.
- Assessment practices should provide a continuum of knowledge about children as they pass from teacher to teacher.
- Assessment practices should be able to inform administrators and those responsible in the community at large for children's work.
- Assessment practices should provide families with concrete information about children's progress.

The *Primary Language Record* is a vehicle for systematically observing students in various aspects of their literacy development -- reading, writing, speaking, and listening -- using particular classroom events and samples of work as the basis for recording their progress and interests; recommending strategies for addressing needs and building on talents; and discussing ideas and perceptions with the students, their parents, and faculty. By virtue of what teachers are asked to observe, the PLR offers a coherent view of language and literacy development and progress. It is grounded in the philosophy that literacy acquisition proceeds in a manner similar to language acquisition -- through immersion in meaningful and purposeful activities. It recognizes that language and literacy learning take place not in isolation but rather in diverse contexts that span the curriculum. It encourages teachers to identify children's strengths and note growth points, to regard errors as information, and to analyze patterns of error in a constructive way.

In these ways, the PLR reflects an overall shift in thinking about the learning process -- a shift recognizing that good teaching is based on intimate knowledge of the child as well as knowledge of the curriculum and teaching strategies. It also represents a shift in thinking about the purposes and uses of assessment -- a shift acknowledging the importance of documenting growth over time in rich, informative ways; a shift creating congruence among values, goals, instruction, and assessment practices.

Essential Principles

The *Primary Language Record* is designed around the following essential principles:

Parent involvement. The PLR encourages meaningful parent involvement in schools in two important ways. First, it provides for an ongoing exchange of information between teachers and parents about children's language and literacy growth. It offers a fuller and rounder picture of children's progress than is given by any standardized test score. Second, it values the knowledge of parents as their children's first teachers by eliciting and utilizing the information they have about their children in the learning process. In these important ways, ongoing parent/school relationships develop throughout the year.

Respect for family. The PLR values each parent's knowledge about his or her children and respects each family's cultural and linguistic background. It takes special note of home language and offers positive support for gathering information about language and literacy development in languages other than English. By asking parents to reflect and report on their children's literacy behaviors, it enables them to recognize growth, and it further encourages activities that are related to literacy development in the home.

Respect for children. The PLR values children in two important ways. First, it recognizes that children come to school with prior knowledge and experience as language users. It looks at them individually, noting growth over time rather than comparing them with other children. It provides authentic information about children's abilities -- a picture that focuses on and values each child's strengths, what each child *can* do, rather than a picture obtained through the lens of a deficit model. Second, it values children's knowledge about themselves. It provides them with the opportunity to be actively involved in evaluating their progress and planning their own work.

Respect for teacher knowledge and professionalism. The PLR builds on teachers' understandings and enhances their professionalism in several ways. First, it draws out and enriches teachers' knowledge and uses it as the basis for educational decisions. In doing so, it acknowledges teachers -- those closest to the learning situation -- as the best assessors of children's growth and the most knowledgeable decision makers regarding instruction. Second, the flexibility of the PLR framework allows for and respects differences among teachers in much the same way that it does for children. Each teacher is able to decide how to manage the frequency, format, and style of observations. Third, it supports both individual and collaborative teacher reflection and learning -- about children and about teaching practice. The PLR is designed to allow all teachers who teach the child to be involved in compiling a full picture of the child's progress and to ensure that their special insights are incorporated into the child's picture and plan.

Format of the PLR

The structure of the *Primary Language Record* provides a framework in which teachers can observe, document, and reflect on the learning of their students in order to guide their instruction. It is a way of organizing and synthesizing information in order to look at an individual student's growth over time. While it offers a format for recording continuous observations about particular aspects of development and learning, it does not mandate a particular time, schedule, or manner of observing or reporting. (See **Observations and Samples** in Appendix D.) Each teacher is free to decide how, when, and where to record information. While the PLR does not demand uniform reporting procedures, it provides a uniform conception of the teaching/learning process through its structure.

The *Primary Language Record* is organized to include the following:

Parent interview. A discussion is held between the teacher and the child's parents or other adult family member(s) and recorded at the beginning of the school year. The purpose of this discussion is to encourage communication and to establish a partnership between home and school. In this interview, parents' knowledge of the child, both at home and at school, is shared with teachers. Parents have the opportunity to comment on what the child reads, writes, and talks about at home, as well as what changes or developments they have noticed. The interview also elicits parents' observations, concerns, hopes, and expectations about their child and his or her experiences of school (see Appendix A).

This information supports children's learning at school by providing the teacher with useful information on a child's development that can be referred to throughout the school year. The teacher learns about such important influences on a child's development as the family's primary language, interactions with brothers and sisters, television viewing, likes and dislikes, and changes that have occurred in the child's language and literacy development. This helps teachers understand how much children know and how much they are involved in a range of language and literacy-related activities in their homes and in their communities.

At the end of the conference, the teacher and parent(s) agree on the points to be recorded in the *Primary Language Record*. This summary becomes part of the child's permanent record. An example is provided below. (See Appendix C for sample PLR reporting forms.)

A1 Record of discussion between child's parent(s) and class teacher

N. likes videos, Mickey Mouse, Charlie Brown, Casper, cartoons, Sesame Street. Sometimes says letters and numbers. Mom teaching him alphabet. Just recently started talking in a way that Mom could understand. (Last year at age 3). Before

that spoke baby talk. Has never had hearing checked (has appointment next week). Mom sits and watches T.V. with N. He gets excited as he watches; screams. Expressing feelings physically -- banging, squealing. He has ABC book, number book; Charlie Brown book. He looks at the pictures. He imitates what cartoon characters do -- especially videos he knows well. Understands Mom most of the time. Always does what Mom says. He's very energetic.

Language/literacy conference between the child and teacher. This conference is designed to give children an opportunity to discuss their experiences, achievements, and interests with the teacher. It, too, takes place at the beginning of the school year. It is meant to enhance already existing dialogue between students and their teacher and to provide a formal opportunity for the students and teacher to collaborate on creating a working plan. For the teacher, the conference reveals student interests, preferences for different learning styles and contexts, and reasons for making particular choices. It also provides insights into the ways in which students' language(s) is developing and supporting their learning. For each child, the conference provides an opportunity to reflect on his or her reading and writing activities and interests, to assess his or her own progress, and to play an increasingly active part in his or her own learning (see Appendix B). A sample record of such a conference with a pre-kindergarten child is provided below:

A2 Record of language/literacy conference with child

N. brought a book over to show me -- Hello School (Book Title). As he looked at pictures, he said: "Baby doing." "Putting coat." "Is baby." "N." (Said his first and last name.) "Butterfingers and bubble gum." (Said this in his own pronunciation. I understood because I've heard him say it to Mom and asked what he meant. Said "Butterfingers and bubble gum" as he pointed to picture of little boy going home from school. His Mom buys him this on their way home every day.) Said a few other things that I didn't understand. "Finished."

Continuous observations about the child as a language user from all teachers who work with that child. This section of the report is completed toward the end of the spring term of the school year. It is compiled from concrete evidence -- the day-to-day observations and records kept by teachers throughout the course of the year. In this section, the child's strategies, approaches, and behaviors in the areas of talking, listening, reading, and writing are all noted. The record asks for notations about particular aspects of development in each area: for example, the child's ability to reflect critically on what he or she reads; the range, quantity, and variety of writing in all areas of the curriculum; the child's involvement in writing narrative and nonnarrative pieces, both alone and collaboratively; the influence of reading on the child's writing; and so on. Although the various aspects of language development are separated in this section of the record, they are all interrelated in that the progress noted in each area mirrors and supports the progress noted in the other areas.

Two kinds of entries are made for each aspect of language development:

(1) observations on the child's progress in that aspect of language learning and (2) a description of any experiences or teaching that have supported the child's development. Also included in this section are special notes regarding the child's use of both primary and secondary languages, any concerns about the child's progress, any ways in which the child's progress is exceptional, or any special educational needs the child may have.

Social and curricular contexts of the classroom are important dimensions of the learning environment that are also explained and included in this section of the *Primary Language Record*. Assessments of the child's progress in all aspects of language development are matched against descriptions of learning opportunities provided in the classroom. Below are samples of what one teacher wrote on the talking and listening portions of this sections of the record.

B1 Talking and listening
Please comment on the child's development and use of spoken language in different social and curriculum contexts, in English and/or other community languages: evidence of talk for learning and thinking; range and variety of talk for particular purposes; experience and confidence in talking and listening with different people in different settings.

N's speech is becoming clearer. I understand at least one or two words every time he speaks. Some words are so clear that I now recognize when he is using a Spanish word. He loves talking about his work, i.e., block buildings, Legos, Duplos, pattern blocks. Often he screams out my name excitedly (many times) to show me. He is beginning to use "talk" to initiate contact with other children. He understands and follows through on most directions given by me. Sometimes he needs to be shown what it is I'm asking him to do. He listens intently at story time, often with lots of facial expressions. He participates in large group discussions. I now understand some of his words. When he doesn't like what is being said to him, he turns his head (often pouting and blinking intensely) and disregards you. When asked a question of a problem-solving nature -- he responds by repeating the question.

What experiences and teaching have helped/would help development in this area? Record outcomes of any discussion with head teacher, other staff, or parent(s).

*<u>Helpful experiences</u> *Interactions with small groups, with teacher present to interpret what he is saying for the other kids. *Modeling use of full and complete sentences. *Singing songs. *Talking with him as he works, verbalizing his actions. *Giving him <u>very</u> <u>verbal</u> <u>and</u> <u>sensitive</u> <u>partners</u>. *Providing clear, slow model of pronunciation of some words.*

<u>How to support further development</u> -- continue above; provide him with options for solving everyday problems; model/scaffold problem solving. Verbalize as go through the motions.

End-of-year comments from the child and his or her parents. Spring conferences are held with the child individually, as well as with the child's family, to elicit comments on their feelings and judgments about the child's work and progress over the year.

Information for the child's teacher for the following year. This section is a final assessment of a child's progress in all aspects of language and literacy learning. It is meant to provide the next year's teacher with up-to-date information about the child's development. It allows current teachers to pass on their experience and understandings of the child and to make suggestions about the kind of support they think the child needs.

Reading scales. Reading scales are an additional feature of the *Primary Language Record*. They provide yet another means of noting growth and development and are directly informed by the evidence teachers gather through observation and documentation of children's growth during the school year. The scales, which are longitudinal measures that can be used to describe a reader's progress over a period of years, outline the processes involved in becoming a competent and experienced reader. They help teachers think about children's progress across a wide age range by offering some helpful ways of describing what a child is able to do, with increasing ease, on the road to developing as a reader. They can also be used to identify children whose reading development is causing some concern.

One reading scale for younger children charts children's progress as readers on a continuum from *dependence to independence*. Another reading scale, for older children, plots the developing *experience* of readers and looks at the ways in which they broaden and deepen their experience of reading many kinds of texts. Copies of both scales are provided on the pages following the end of this chapter.

In addition to their usefulness in identifying individual children's progress in a shorthand format, these scales can also be used annually to monitor the reading levels of groups of children. Scale scores can be aggregated to indicate the number and proportion of students reading at different levels. Using the scales in this way can enable schools to obtain an overall picture of the reading performance of their students and to consider instructional strategies accordingly.

Research in schools serving more than 4,000 London students has found that the scales are reported useful to teachers and schools in several ways: They help teachers to be better observers of children; they provide a conceptual framework for understanding development; and they enable teachers to identify students' difficulties and strengths. This supports teaching practice by giving teachers information as to the range and variety of materials, books, and experiences they should plan to use.

The scales also provide continuity in understanding and reporting a child's development. They provide a shared view and language for recording student progress among teachers and across grades. They help teachers talk with and report to parents by providing a meaningful vocabulary and framework based on concrete aspects of development

(Centre for Language in Primary Education [CLPE], 1990).

Two surveys carried out in England by the Research and Statistics Branch of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) have provided additional information about the reading scales. In addition to validating the scale scores' potential for assessing reading achievement against other assessments (CLPE, 1990)[2] the surveys indicated that the reading scales provide fuller information on a pupil's progress than do standardized tests. Finally, the surveys revealed that the reading scales can be effective as a diagnostic tool, not only indicating which students require extra help with reading but also pointing to what kinds of supports these students need.

This evidence supports the broad potential of the reading scales for monitoring reading performance in schools along with assessing individual student progress. This kind of regular, longitudinal assessment can enable teachers and schools to respond to the needs of all children, and especially to the particular needs of students who are found to be developing in different ways or at different rates. The kind of assessment offered by the PLR provides detailed and useful information that simultaneously performs two functions: it informs instruction in classrooms and it can serve to inform the community at large about schoolwide student performance.

[2] The ILEA's 1989 validation survey found high correlations between scale 2 levels and London Reading Test Scores. Another study of 400 students in Lewisham found that the first reading scale also correlates highly with other forms of assessment, including the British national curriculum's Standard Assessment Tasks and teacher assessments (r=.84) (Feeney and Hann, 1991).

Figure 1

Becoming a reader: reading scale 1

DEPENDENCE

↑

Beginner reader 1	Does not have enough successful strategies for tackling print independently. Relies on having another person read the text aloud. May still be unaware that text carries meaning.
Non-fluent reader 2	Tackling known and predictable texts with growing confidence but still needing support with new and unfamiliar ones. Growing ability to predict meanings and developing strategies to check predictions against other cues such as the illustrations and the print itself.
Moderately fluent reader 3	Well-launched on reading but still needing to return to a familiar range of texts. At the same time beginning to explore new kinds of texts independently. Beginning to read silently.
Fluent reader 4	A capable reader who now approaches familiar texts with confidence but still needs support with unfamiliar materials. Beginning to draw inferences from books and stories read independently. Chooses to read silently.
Exceptionally fluent reader 5	An avid and independent reader, who is making choices from a wide range of material. Able to appreciate nuances and subtleties in texts.

↓

INDEPENDENCE

Figure 2

Experience as a reader across the curriculum: reading scale 2

INEXPERIENCED

Inexperienced reader 1	Experience as a reader has been limited. Generally chooses to read very easy and familiar texts where illustrations play an important part. Has difficulty with any unfamiliar material and yet may be able to read own dictated texts confidently. Needs a great deal of support with the reading demands of the classroom. Over-dependent on one strategy when reading aloud; often reads word by word. Rarely chooses to read for pleasure.
Less experienced reader 2	Developing fluency as a reader and reading certain kinds of material with confidence. Usually chooses short books with simple narrative shapes and with illustrations and may read these silently; often re-reads favourite books. Reading for pleasure often includes comics and magazines. Needs help with the reading demands of the classroom and especially with using reference and information books.
Moderately experienced reader 3	A confident reader who feels at home with books. Generally reads silently and is developing stamina as a reader. Is able to read for longer periods and cope with more demanding texts, including children's novels. Willing to reflect on reading and often uses reading in own learning. Selects books independently and can use information books and materials for straightforward reference purposes, but still needs help with unfamiliar material, particularly non-narrative prose.
Experienced reader 4	A self-motivated, confident and experienced reader who may be pursuing particular interests through reading. Capable of tackling some demanding texts and can cope well with the reading of the curriculum. Reads thoughtfully and appreciates shades of meaning. Capable of locating and drawing on a variety of sources in order to research a topic independently.
Exceptionally experienced reader 5	An enthusiastic and reflective reader who has strong established tastes in fiction and/or non-fiction. Enjoys pursuing own reading interests independently. Can handle a wide range and variety of texts, including some adult material. Recognizes that different kinds of texts require different styles of reading. Able to evaluate evidence drawn from a variety of information sources. Is developing critical awareness as a reader.

EXPERIENCED

Chapter 3
The *Primary Language Record* at P.S. 261

P.S. 261 is located in Boerum Hill, a racially and economically mixed neighborhood just south of downtown Brooklyn. It is an elementary school of about 700 students, 35 teachers, and support staff.

The *Primary Language Record* was introduced at P.S. 261 in the summer of 1991. The school's principal, Arthur Foresta, first learned about the PLR from District Superintendent William Casey. Foresta was intrigued by what he heard about the PLR, especially since he had already begun encouraging a whole-language approach to literacy development and had stopped buying basal readers for the school. He supported three teachers' attendance at an intensive, week-long PLR summer course jointly sponsored by the Fund for New York City Public Education and the Accountability Project of the New York City Board of Education's Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (OERA). These teachers were asked to share their knowledge about the PLR with the school community at several workshops early in the fall of the following school year. Jill Benado, an assistor from OREA, facilitated these meetings.

As a result of the meetings, all 11 of the pre-K through grade 1 teachers in the school agreed to try the PLR with several children in their classes. These teachers were supported by regular classroom visits from Benado and by voluntary weekly lunchtime meetings at the school. Four teachers also attended a biweekly after school study group led by Benado that focused on issues raised by the use of the *Primary Language Record*.

In the spring of 1992, an additional six third- through sixth-grade teachers joined the project. They began using the *Primary Language Record* with two children each and met for guidance in after-school sessions. A second summer session in July 1992 involved still more teachers at both beginning and advanced stages of PLR understanding and use.

A Look at a Classroom: The PLR in Action

Classroom practices of teachers using the *Primary Language Record* share some common characteristics. The ways in which classrooms are arranged, the kinds of learning activities offered, the ways in which teachers interact with students, and the attitudes teachers have toward learning are focused on students' need for active engagement with a wide array of literacy activities. A description of Mark Buswinka's classroom tells the story of the kind

of teaching that supports and is supported by the *Primary Language Record*'s use.

Buswinka is a first-grade teacher with five years experience. Before coming to P.S. 261 last year, he taught at an alternative program in another district.

His classroom is organized into several areas, all well stocked with a rich array of materials. In addition to an extensive library of children's literature, there is a block area, a dramatic play area, an animal/nature area, an art area, and an area where manipulative math materials are organized. Desks are clustered in groups.

Children's work is attractively displayed both inside and outside the classroom. These displays surround the children with meaningful, interesting print relevant to their classroom experiences. A mural entitled "Animals Are Different" reflects an extensive class study of different animal species. Drawings of books by favorite authors make up another display. Under each book title are comments by the children. Some of the comments about Ezra Jack Keats' ***Regards to the Man in the Moon*** (1987) are:

I like it when they went to the space ship.
I didn't like the monsters.
I like the way the sky looked in space.
I like when the boy uses his imagination.
He went up to the moon.

The daily schedule of this class is structured so that long stretches of time are available for children to engage in different activities in the various areas of the room. While some periods of time may be devoted solely to literacy activities, within this time children have many different choices.

For example, reading and writing take place simultaneously during the morning. Some children sit alone or with a partner, reading books. They choose books according to their interests and tastes. Some choose the famous Clifford books by Bridwell; some choose folk tales like ***Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*** (Aardema, 1978); some choose books based on the popular Ninja Turtle movies; some use small, easy reader books imported from England. In one section of the room, several boys take turns reading out loud to each other. They appear to know these texts almost by memory. They show each other how to use the pictures to help figure out unknown words.

Some children are in the Listening Center -- an area in the classroom set up for playing cassette tapes. Here children read their books along with a taped version of the story. Other children gather together on the rug around "big book." It is the size of giant easel paper, has large pictures, oversized print, and phrases with a catchy rhythm and pattern. The children read it together by pointing to each easily distinguishable word as they go along.

Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?
I see a red bird looking at me.

Red bird, red bird, what do you see?
I see a yellow duck looking at me.

Yellow duck, yellow duck, what do you see?
I see a blue horse looking at me (Martin and Carle, 1967, pp. 1-6).

Sometimes Buswinka reads big books to the whole class. Sometimes the whole group chants the story together. Lots of discussion about the action takes place afterward.

Writing activities are also going on during this time. Writing is broadly interpreted in this class so that children are allowed to express themselves in a range of ways. Some children draw; some make marks of unrelated letters; some use "invented spelling" (self-initiated phonetic spelling of words); and a very few use words written in conventional spellings. Pencils, crayons, markers, gluings, and an old typewriter are all used for these purposes.

This plethora of activities goes on while Buswinka moves about the room, notecards in hand, assisting students and facilitating different situations. After answering the questions of a group of children writing together in one corner of the room, he sits individually with a succession of children. He helps one child read by pointing to the words as they go along. He helps another by reading back to her what she has already written. He helps another child by taking dictation of her story in the little book that she made and illustrated. He helps yet another by encouraging her to identify initial sounds of the words she wants to spell. With each child, he jots a few notes down on his notecards to remind him of the nature of the interaction.

At the end of the work session, a sharing meeting takes place. The children gather on the rug and take turns presenting their pieces of writing to the group. The child who is presenting sits on a chair in the circle while the other children gather around on the floor. The presenter reads his or her story while showing the pictures. When finished, he or she calls on other children for comments and questions. These comments provide the authors with useful feedback that affirms their efforts and can help them revise their work.

First comment:	I don't really know what your story's about.
Presenter:	It was about a dream.
Second comment:	It was a nice story. I would like it more if you had explained in the story that it was a dream. I didn't really know that.

Third comment: *How long did it take you to write?*

Presenter: Two weeks. No, three weeks.

As the children conduct the meeting, Buswinka sits toward the back of the circle taking notes. Occasionally he asks a question that provides clues for other children about how the writing process was done. For example, to a girl who read a journal about her recent vacation, he asks: "How did you know what to write about on what day?" She answers: "At the end of each day, I wrote about what happened so that I would remember it."

The sharing session is not exclusively for written compositions. It accommodates many forms in which writing is used. For example, one boy shares a game he made called "Fake Money." It was inspired by a story Buswinka read to the class about a boy who won things in a game. It has a colorfully decorated, homemade envelope with handmade picture game cards inside. The game's enthusiastic reception by the group reflects Buswinka's acceptance and valuing of many forms and expressions of language learning.

Buswinka thinks that his teaching practice connects to the documenting and observing process of the *Primary Language Record:*

> I use what I learn about the kids from observing them to help support them in their work. The observing makes me more precise. It also makes teaching harder (but more interesting as well) because it makes me demand more of myself and ask more questions about my teaching. For example, I want to know more about the kids who are struggling with reading. I want to figure out better what they need and refine how I work with them. How do you do sound/letter correspondence with kids who don't hear sounds? Do you help develop other strategies? Or do you work on it more? This work has made me extremely aware of how wide the gap gets between children for whom reading and academics come easily and those for whom it doesn't. What do you do? How much do you focus on it? How much are they stalling and in need of support? How much do you say, "You need to practice."? And if you say that, what message are you giving them about reading?

As he reflects on children's learning, Buswinka asks questions that allow him to examine his own practice to evaluate the consequences of his decisions for children's motivation and learning strategies. These questions enable him to undertake a deeper inquiry into the range of possibilities for teaching.

A Look at a Child Through the Lens of the PLR

Buswinka has learned a lot about Carla, a child he has followed with the PLR all year. He interviewed both Carla and her mother in October to complete the initial section of the PLR, giving him some background information. By systematically collecting samples of her work and by regularly writing down his observations of her throughout the school year, Buswinka has compiled a portrait of Carla's growth over time. His notecards document things that Carla *can* do (see Figure 3 at the end of this chapter). These observations are correlated to specific pieces of work that Carla has completed. For example, from several pieces collected in October, Buswinka learned that Carla knew the difference between pictures and print (see Figure 4), that she did not yet understand the concept of directionality (see Figure 5), and that she was aware of uses of print in her environment (see Figure 6). From a running record[3] made during Carla's reading of ***Whistle for Willie*** (Keats, 1964) in February, Buswinka noted that her reading strategies rely heavily on pictures and the meaning of the text. He also noted that she shows an awareness of letters, shows an interest in print, and knows what she does not know (see Figure 7).

Buswinka sums up these and other observations in the reading section of the *Primary Language Record*.

> **B2 Reading**
> Please comment on the child's progress and development as a reader in English and/or other community languages: the stage at which the child is operating (refer to the reading scales at the end of Chapter 2); the range, quantity and variety of reading in all areas of the curriculum; the child's pleasure and involvement in story and reading, alone or with others; the range of strategies used when reading and the child's ability to reflect critically on what is read.
>
> *Carla is in love with books. She enjoys reading them and uses some book language if it is a known text. Carla uses the pictures to keep up a story line. Her attention to meaning causes her to disregard one to one to keep going. Carla reads back her own writing -- focusing on initial consonants. She has gone from a beginning reader to a non-fluent reader (#2).*
>
> What experiences and teaching have helped/would have development in this area? Record outcomes of any discussion with head teacher, other staff, or parent(s).
>
> *Carla likes to reread big books that have been shared. She practices with friends and*

[3] When a teacher keeps a running record, he or she documents a child's oral reading of a text by noting on the text what and how the child reads and what strategies he uses for decoding.

likes books that have song lyrics as text. We could effectively use these known texts to focus on one to one. Knowledge of initial consonants should be encouraged and expanded. Story Box books could be used to build confidence and reinforce use of pictures one to one and confirming guesses with initial consonants.

When Buswinka shared these and other observations gained from his ongoing documentation of Carla's work with his colleagues at a lunchtime teacher meeting, they made note of the many things Carla could do:

She is aware of the purposes for reading and writing.

She understands book protocol, such as "by Carla."

She knows what a title is.

She shows knowledge of and attention to initial consonants.

She correlates pictures and words.

She uses pictures to find meaning in the text.

She has developed her own strategies to identify letters and words.

She knows the difference between letters that make words and those that don't.

She is writing more words on her own as time goes by.

She is on the road to connecting it all.

In discussing work together in this way, the teachers are doing more than learning about an individual child. They are actually examining their teaching practice and sharing their knowledge about the process of learning to read. They are also sharing strategies about how best to support children's literacy growth. As they answer each others' questions, they also raise many new ones. For example, Buswinka's description of Carla led to a discussion among teachers about the need to focus on meaning when reading and writing with a child. It generated concrete instructional suggestions and emphasized the importance of respect for the child's own path to literacy development. Buswinka's description of Carla reminded everyone of a common occurrence:

What should a teacher do when a child writes something one way but reads it back as something else? Should you write what the child is saying on the text or should you leave it alone?

In reflecting on this question, the teachers agreed that respect for the child should be

expressed by not altering her work. However, many alternative suggestions were made:

> Write post-its on the back so you can remember what the child said.
>
> *Don't* write in front of the child but *do* jot down what is said.
>
> Only select some pieces to save and record. The child will read back what is really meaningful and you can note that.
>
> Keep an ongoing record of growth.
>
> This seems to be happening because Carla appears to be attending more to print in writing than in reading. Take dictation from her and have her read it back.
>
> Point when reading with her to help her develop one-to-one correspondence of words with sound.

Through discussions such as these, teachers participate in a process that is both *teacher research* and *professional development*. As part of this process, they are investigating the learning paths of individual children, they are examining many different approaches to learning, and they are learning about themselves as teachers.

The Role of the Principal

The school's principal, Arthur Foresta, has done a great deal to facilitate the rapid introduction and implementation of the *Primary Language Record* throughout P.S. 261. He views the PLR as supportive of his overall educational vision and goals. In conversation, he said:

> My goal for this school is to have teachers know the individuality of each child -- each child's strengths, knowledge, experiences, needs, and family circumstances -- in order to enact the most effective plan of instruction. Of course, for teachers to get to know each child they also have to develop a classroom environment that is centered on active inquiry, that allows for varied experiences, that promotes discussion and sharing. I will bring anything into this school that will encourage the adults to work in this way, to look closely at individual children, and to help them become more understanding and compassionate.

Foresta encourages all kinds of programs and staff-development initiatives in P.S. 261 that foster this belief. In addition to the *Primary Language Record*, staff are also engaged in

using the *Descriptive Review of a Child* (Prospect Center, 1986), a collaborative faculty process of carefully describing and discussing a child as a team to address a specific question or concern. In the areas of literacy and language development, the PLR builds on a number of other compatible approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment. One is a process approach to writing that encourages writing in a natural manner and setting (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983). Another is the use of running records or miscue analysis in reading, an assessment technique that identifies individual children's reading strategies and charts change in these strategies and strengths over time (Goodman and Burke, 1972; Goodman, 1979, 1982; Goodman, Watson, and Burke, 1987). Still another is the use of reading logs -- lists kept by children of what books they have read, the dates they read them, and both children's and teachers' comments on the readings.

Some teachers keep writing and mathematics portfolios -- collections of children's work, compiled with the input of students, dated, and chronicled over the course of the school year (or years). Some teachers also prepare alternative report cards, which provide narrative descriptions of children's growth and development supported by detailed teacher observations of children and their work. The Reading Recovery program (Clay, 1985) provides a holistic, individualized support program for first-grade children in the Chapter 1 program who require additional literacy supports.

Foresta's intention in bringing all of these approaches into the school is to support the growth of both teachers and children:

> I want to help teachers get away from looking at what children *can't* do and to focus instead on what they *can* do. I want the youngsters to be terrific readers who also love to read. They will do well on the tests if we teach reading well. The tests will not drive the curriculum in this school. Hopefully, our good teaching will show up in test scores. But we won't start drilling kids from September.

The Role of the Assistor

The presence of the OREA assistor, Jill Benado, has been critical to the implementation efforts of the *Primary Language Record*. A staff member of the Center for Educational Options, an organization providing staff development in literacy areas, she has spent several years in the school, working with teachers from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints who represent a spectrum of grade levels and subject areas. Together they have been formulating child-centered goals and practices.

Benado's presence in the school two days a week has supported teachers in a variety of ways. She visits classrooms regularly and works side-by-side with the teachers involved

in the PLR project. She provides resources and materials for teachers to use in their work with the children, as well as articles for their own professional growth. Her presence in the classroom gives teachers the opportunity to discuss their practice in depth with another colleague. She is a mirror to them as well as a sounding board for their ideas.

The teacher meetings she facilitates give teachers the opportunity to collaborate with their peers. At the lunch and after-school meetings, teachers share concerns with one another and reflect together on what have they have learned and what else they can do to support the literacy development of their students.

Benado has established a sense of trust and acceptance among the teachers at P.S. 261 by clearly exhibiting how much she respects and values their work. Her understandings of the realities of classroom life, of the teaching/learning process, of literacy development, and of the needs of teachers have enabled her both to facilitate discussions and to provide direction for collaborative work. In an unobtrusive manner, she has undertaken those tasks, however small, that make it possible for the staff to forge plans, to follow through on projects, and to make sure that the projects actually happen. She takes care of even such details as regularly ordering food for lunchtime meetings.

An important characteristic of Benado's work is her skill at asking probing questions that aid reflection:

What new things did you learn?
What surprised you?
How do you think you'll use what you've learned?

These are intended to help teachers construct and synthesize their own understandings. The "right" way is never dictated or imposed. By working in this manner, Benado is able to tap into teachers' implicit knowledge and to make it visible to all. Her approach also encourages teacher collaboration by promoting a sharing of information, strategies, and resources.

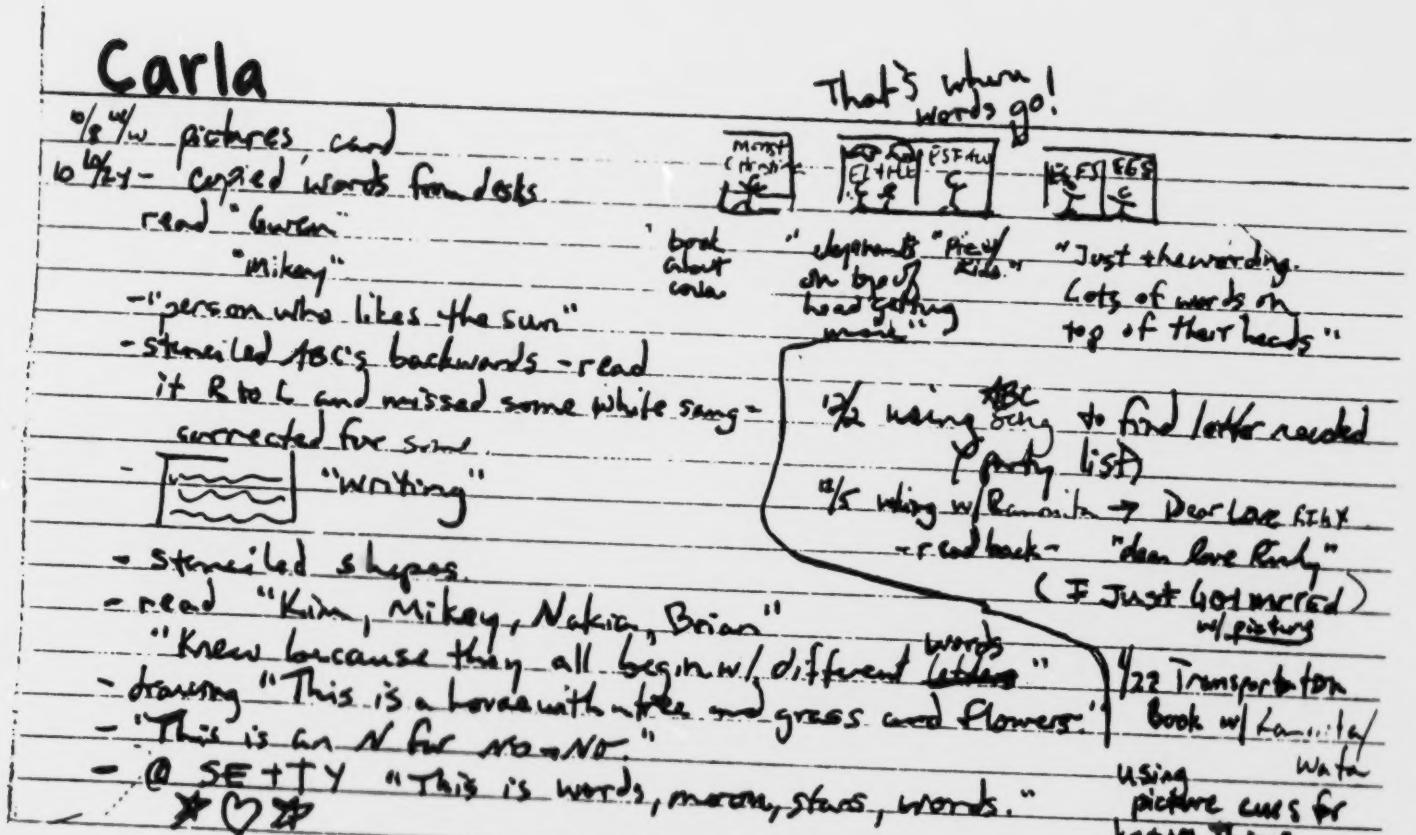
Carla
That's where words go!
"Just the wording. Lots of words on top of their heads"
"Writing"
"Kim, Mikey, Nakia, Brian"
"Knew because they all begin w/ different letters"
"This is a house with trees and grass and flowers."
"This is an N for NANA."
"This is words, words, stars, words."
Book w/ Family
Using picture cues for known things.

Figure 3

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Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

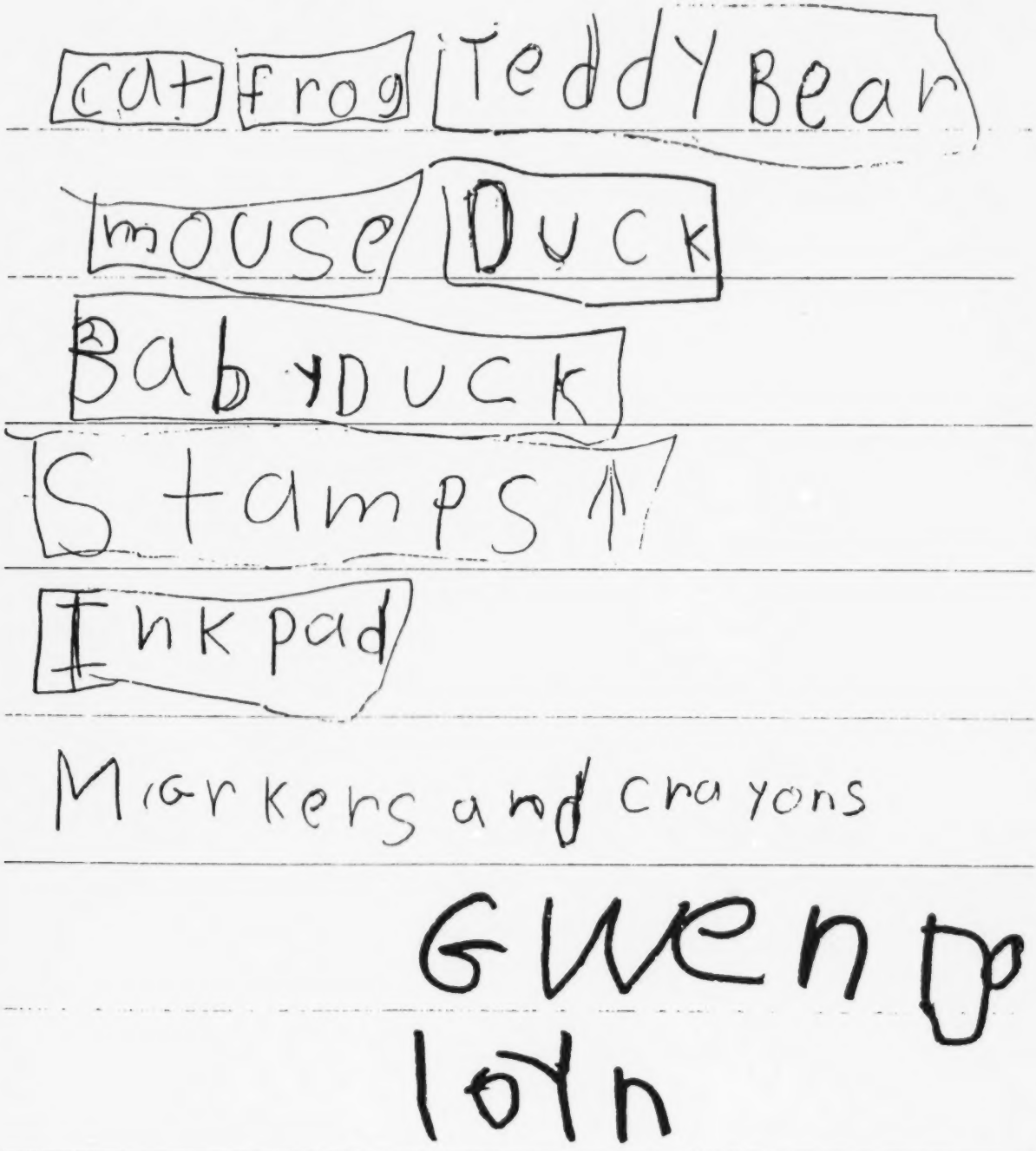

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Figure 7

Oh, how Peter wished he could whistle!

He saw a boy playing with his dog. Whenever the boy whistled, the dog ran straight to him.

Peter tried and tried to whistle, but he couldn't. So instead he began to turn himself around- around and around he whirled... faster and faster....

When he stopped everything turned down...and up...and up...and down...and around and around.

Peter saw his dog, Willie, coming. Quick as a wink, he hid in an empty carton lying on the sidewalk. "Wouldn't it be funny if I whistled?" Peter thought. "Willie would stop and look all around to see who it was." Peter tried to whistle - but still he couldn't. So Willie just walked on.

Peter got out of the carton and started home. On the way he took some colored chalks out of his pocket and drew a long, long line

right up to his door. He stood there and tried to whistle again. He blew till his cheeks were tired. But nothing happened.

He went into his house and put on his father's old hat to make himself feel more grown-up. He looked into the mirror to practice whistling. Still no whistle!

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Chapter 4
The Influence of the PLR on Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

The use of the PLR influences many aspects of school and classroom life, including the climate and culture of the school and the nature of teaching and learning.

Influences on Teaching

The use of the *Primary Language Record* has affected different teachers in different ways. It has provided validation to those teachers whose long-established practices are congruent with the PLR philosophy. To those teachers for whom this philosophy is new, however, the *Primary Language Record* has been an opportunity to test out new ideas and to try out new practices with guidance and support.

A closer look at two teachers at different stages of development reveals some interesting and instructive aspects of how authentic assessment can influence and change teaching practices.

The Experienced Teacher

Alina Alvarez has been teaching for 14 years and is presently an early childhood teacher at P.S. 261.

> As a pre-kindergarten teacher, I've always tried to build on children's strengths rather than classify them by their weaknesses. It has always made me angry when children with special needs or children who speak languages other than English or children who come from poor or working class homes are described by our school system as "deficient" (Alvarez, 1991, p. 11).

In conversations, she underscores this point:

> The *Primary Language Record* has supported my view of children and of learning by encouraging observation of students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the context of classroom activities. It offers me a framework in which I can pull together and organize these observations. This provides me with concrete information about

each student's learning process which then guides my teaching in a way that standardized test scores and preconceived developmental checklists simply cannot do.

The most important learning that Alvarez attributes to her involvement with the *Primary Language Record* is in regard to parents.

> As part of my PLR work, I interviewed the parents of all the children in my class. In the past, I always thought that I had respect for parents, but I was amazed at how much I could learn from them about literacy. I was struck by how much parents know about their kids in general and about their literacy development in particular. For example, they would tell me that their kids could read a "walk" sign or a supermarket flyer.
>
> I was also amazed at how much I didn't know about the parents themselves. I gained a heightened awareness of and respect for their backgrounds and cultures. I learned to be more sensitive to questions that implied value judgements, such as, "Do you read to your child?" Instead, I learned to phrase questions in a nonjudgmental way geared toward getting useful information, such as, "Tell me about when your child watches TV, reads, looks at magazines, etc." I learned to listen to parents differently and to help them develop a positive, sometimes different, perspective on their children by reflecting back to them what they already know. This has enabled me to develop a partnership, rather than a one-sided relationship in which I am the expert telling them what I know.

Working with the PLR has also increased Alvarez's respect for and knowledge of children. The child-interview section of the record, she says, has "given me an indication of how much kids know about their own learning process."

The cumulative effect of using the PLR has been that Alvarez has enriched her knowledge of her own teaching. She attributes this in large part to her reflecting, talking, and sharing with colleagues.

> If a teacher just did this on her own and didn't talk to anyone else about it, I don't think it would foster reflection. But when teachers talk with each other in a group about kids' strengths and weaknesses, there's a mixture of different kinds of thinking, and that helps us look at kids and figure out how to help them grow. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 11)

The Newer Teacher

For many teachers, the form of record-keeping and assessment that the *Primary Language Record* entails is new. Its use often encourages them to change certain things about the classroom as well as to develop new teaching strategies.

> The PLR presupposes that learning takes place within a social context, and that the responsibility for growth doesn't lie only with the teacher but is shared with children and parents. And it presupposes that classrooms are set up in flexible ways. For instance, how can you record kids' talk if they are not able or allowed to talk to each other in the classroom? Teachers have to change things in order to do the PLR and changing those things changes how they teach. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 11)

Buswinka has noted two important changes resulting from his use of the *Primary Language Record*. One change is in the behavior of the children. He believes that the act of observing and recording children's work actually influences what they do in the classroom. For example, he keeps track of his students' reading behaviors by noting them on file cards that he keeps hanging on a hook. When his students asked him what he was writing about, he told them he was noticing what, when, and how they read. Since then, he notes, not only do they read more, but they also point out to him when and how they are doing it.

The other change noted is in his awareness of children, their reading, and their development:

> The *Primary Language Record* has helped me learn how to teach. It is the first real reading course I've ever taken. No one ever said to me, "Look at kids." Courses I took just said, "Do this to them, or do that to them." But with the PLR I can really watch kids and see how they develop. It helps me know what to look for. By watching them I can learn. I'm working *with* them, not doing things *to* them. The PLR lays it right out. It is a framework for the kind of teacher I want to be.

Supports for "Teaching to the Child"

Teachers who use the *Primary Language Record* find that it enriches the way they look at children, the way they look at families, and the ways in which they teach. The *Primary Language Record* supports teachers in better understanding how children learn by providing a framework with which they can examine their students' learning strategies. It helps teachers to see their students even more closely as individuals. As the PLR helps teachers to observe and document the growth of individual children, it makes each child's actual growth more visible and consequently enables teachers to be more appreciative and supportive of children's strengths. Rather than "teaching to the test," teachers are supported in their desire to "teach to the child."

Third- through sixth-grade teachers who attended an after-school study group spoke about the new things they learned from using the PLR:

From doing child interviews, we all found out more than we knew, all that's not revealed so clearly in the classroom.

We may have known what the social worker's or psychologist's report said about a child's home life, but talking to children one-on-one for the PLR interview is different. We developed an intimacy. We were struck by how eager the kids were to connect.

For teachers, the process of writing observations goes beyond recording information. It informs their pedagogical thinking and often expands their instructional practices as well. By carefully observing and reflecting on their observations, teachers gain a heightened awareness of the different strategies children are using in learning to read. They are then able to intervene more knowledgeably by analyzing strategies, supporting those that are being used, and introducing those that are not.

For example, careful observation of one child may reveal that the child has a grasp of syntax and meaning, but needs more support in phonetic skills. A close look at another child may reveal something entirely different: The child has phonetic skills but has not been able to connect those skills with the general meaning generated by the text. A teacher who is observant and knowledgeable about these differences can use this information to support children's reading growth.

These pedagogical understandings and skills support a communication-rich environment for language and literacy learning. Generally, a teacher using the PLR is providing times for reading in the classroom in which significant time is spent listening to individual students, a great deal of peer and group work takes place, and students have substantial autonomy. The reading time is generally structured so that the teacher can move about while children work independently or in small groups. This gives the children opportunities to engage in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, while giving the teacher opportunities to observe, record, and assist children individually. The teacher functions more as a reading facilitator than as a reading instructor.

The conceptualization of reading instruction that develops as a result of the *Primary Language Record*'s use often spills over to influence the entire classroom environment. The use of the *Primary Language Record* supports teachers in developing not just keener understandings of literacy development, but enriched understandings of the teaching/learning process in general.[4] This is evident in the more open, flexible classroom arrangements of PLR teachers as well as in their general use of more diverse learning materials and strategies. It is also evident in the more flexible scheduling of their day, which allows for

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[4] The usefulness of the *Primary Language Record* in England led to the creation of a Primary Learning Record that uses similar strategies for observing and assessing student's progress in science, mathematics, social studies, and other subjects.

greater integration of all subject matters and connects literacy development to study in all the disciplines.

PLR teachers see the need for learning experiences to be placed in meaningful and purposeful contexts. They understand that learning is a social process, and they provide more opportunities in their classrooms for discussion, dialogue, and exchange of viewpoints. The PLR supports their recognition of the importance of concrete materials for learning new things, and they are encouraged to stock their rooms with materials and to incorporate experiences that lend themselves to active inquiry: manipulatives for mathematics; a range of materials for expression in print and other art forms; animals, plants, and cooking for the study of science; trips to develop social studies concepts; and so on. These teachers also value a diverse range of learning styles and forms of expression. Children's approaches, dispositions, and strategies for learning are appreciated as much as their products.

Many teachers using the *Primary Language Record* also experience a sense of personal growth and development. They value the professional collaboration and personal reflection that the PLR stimulates as essential elements of being a teacher. They see reflection, dialogue, and conversation with colleagues as a critical part of the learning process. They see the in-depth examination of children and their learning as an impetus for building knowledge. They see asking questions as a means for developing new possibilities in their teaching. They find themselves increasingly able to replace judgments about children with compassion and understanding. They also become more confident about what it is that they know, and they are more comfortable talking about it.

Influences on Learning

The professional growth of teachers that is encouraged by the *Primary Language Record* translates directly to student growth and positive attitudes toward reading. Reading, writing, and the school experience in general are more pleasurable and productive when teachers are able to connect intimately with children and their work. Alejandra, a bilingual kindergarten child, describes her learning life in this way:

> I *love* writing! I wrote this [referring to a paper with her marks on it] with all the different colors. It's for my mother and my father. I like to go to Block Area. I made a big, special building. I like to go to Housekeeping Area. I like it *all. All* the time! I like to play at Drawing and Writing and Easel too!

Catherine, a seven-year-old first-grader, also finds enjoyment in books:

> Reading is fun. I like books to play with. I read the title of books I know. I look at

the pages inside of it, and then I start reading. I play with the books at home . . . . play school. I read to Grandma and Mom and Dad and my aunt and myself and my doll.

Children's literacy development, as well as their educational growth in general, is supported by having teachers who are more observant of what they actually can do and who use this knowledge to inform their teaching practice. Relying on the concrete evidence of children's work leads teachers to look at children through their strengths rather than through their deficits. This is helpful to all students. It appears to be especially so for children with special needs -- those with special learning challenges and those whose dominant languages are not English. Lucy Lopez, a kindergarten-through-second-grade bilingual special education teacher, recounts how keeping a diary of her observations has clarified her understandings of particular children and subsequently affected her ability to help them learn.

> Jeremy had me confused. He doesn't speak in complete sentences; sometimes he'll only talk in Spanish. I thought he didn't understand. But from watching him in different settings and from interviewing him for the PLR, I learned that he *can* talk appropriately and he *does* understand.
>
> There is another child, Jorge, whom I used to think was not learning -- that he was hyperactive. I used to focus more on his behavior. Now it doesn't bother me as much. I focus on what he *can* do. I found that if things are presented to him in context, if he has visual aids around him, he *can* get it.
>
> Using the PLR has helped me to focus on the kids more -- to see what they say and about what. It has helped me to understand them more, to understand their language in different situations, to focus more on how they communicate, to see their needs and their strengths.

Students' learning is thus supported by the increased knowledge and understanding that teachers get from their use of the PLR. The benefits of their teachers' professional development are evident in the help students receive in refining their skills. They are strengthened by their teachers' recognition of the complexities of the learning process. Their growth is enhanced by the fact that their teachers are less likely to categorize them in static ways and more likely to observe and describe nuances in their strengths and learning styles. Children are given greater room for the expression of their individual styles, paces, and interests because the classroom environment is more open to diversity. They thrive in a dynamic that supports their strengths and values their complexities.

One other benefit of the PLR for students is that they have input into their learning process through interviews and conferences. These serve to inform teachers about children's prior knowledge and interests, about what they presently understand, and about what they also know about their own learning styles and processes. The result of this is to enhance teacher responsiveness to student needs.

In a conference with her teacher, Catherine revealed how much she knows about the purposes of print:

> You make nice people, nice writing, pictures of cats. Then you put the words. Then you write what it is about, then you show it to the people that like it. If it is for them, you give it to them.

In this same conference, Catherine also revealed several of her own learning strategies:

> If I don't know [something], I ask what it says. Then I watch them [Mom, Dad] read it to you and then you know the title and what it is about. Then you can read it by yourself. If no one is there, you figure it out yourself by listening and thinking. When you get it, you show your mom what you can do.

Influences on Home and School Relationships

Partnerships between home and school are strengthened through the use of the *Primary Language Record*. It fosters sensitivity and support for family cultures and languages. It values and uses parent knowledge. It promotes enhanced communication between home and school by offering greater opportunity for family input into the learning process.

The PLR serves as a support to family education in that it provides parents with concrete examples, enhanced by developmental understanding and research, of their children's literacy acquisition. In family conferences, teachers are able to demonstrate clearly to parents the growth of the children based on evidence compiled throughout the school year. Teachers can share with parents such developmental markers as the books that children read, the strategies that children use most readily, the strategies in need of support, and the interests and approaches that children bring to their learning.

Through concrete examples found in children's work, teachers are also able to interpret and explain to parents innovative teaching practices such as invented spelling. The result of such communication is the intentional building of a community that is knowledgeable and supportive of children's learning. One parent reflects on what she has learned about her child:

> I've learned how to look [at my child] from areas of strength. I've gained confidence in what is happening with him.

Another parent says:

> A lot of stuff that [the teacher] exposed me to made sense to me as a parent. I'm learning to relax, learning to help my children with less anxiety. It's been very, very helpful. It's helped me to understand my own learning in a more objective way. It's important to understand how you learn because it helps you understand how others learn. It's made learning a lot more fun. Parents want to be a part, feel relaxed and at home, so that they can do more for their kids.

Influences on the School

From the administrator's point of view, the *Primary Language Record* strengthens all parts of the school. Foresta believes this very strongly:

> The PLR's support of teachers' development promotes an atmosphere of continual learning in the school. It increases teachers' understandings, enhances their commitments, and promotes professionalism and a sense of community. This impacts on the children by supporting their growth as readers and learners.
>
> The PLR's inclusion of family input provides a vehicle for respectful partnerships between home and school. As an alternative to relegating parent involvement to bake sales and other fund-raising chores, it offers a meaningful way to include families in the life of the school.

The PLR is also useful for administrators in demonstrating how their schools are accountable to children, families, and the larger community. The full picture the PLR provides for each child demonstrates the school's integrity and thoroughness with regard to individual children. The record-keeping process itself permits teachers to be accountable in a comprehensive way and supports the quality of instruction. In addition, the reading scales can be used to aggregate meaningful, quantifiable data on groups of children, if that is necessary or desired.

Implications for Accountability

As a result of using the *Primary Language Record*, teachers and schools become more accountable to students, to themselves, and to their community. The day-to-day observations of children that form the basis of the record guide teaching in more child-centered ways. This makes it harder for students to "fall through the cracks" because teachers keep track of

what and how their students are learning. Close examination of their students' work, combined with reflection on and discussions of their teaching practice, builds teacher knowledge about literacy and the learning process.

Sharing information in the interviews and conference portions of the record -- from family to school, from school to family, from student to teacher, and from teacher to student -- also makes for more thorough and rounded accountability. The summary written for the child's next teacher provides a unique opportunity for continuity of knowledge about a student. This collaborative following of a child's growth from year to year, along with the essential ongoing dialogue among teachers that is a critical part of the PLR's use, promotes a professionalism in the school that strengthens its accountability to all parties involved.

Chapter 5
Lessons for Implementing
The *Primary Language Record*

Successful implementation of an innovation such as the PLR throughout a school depends on some fundamental conditions. One of these is leadership that endorses, promotes, and facilitates its use. Another is the ongoing support and resources of a staff developer who can help teachers find their own way when they feel overwhelmed by the hard work of change, when they bump up against the reality of the change process, or when they find they want additional information, ideas, feedback, and opportunities for problem solving.

Finally, however, the success of the PLR, within a single school and within the public school system at large, rests with several major structural challenges. One challenge is how to provide the time needed for the observing, recording, and conferencing work that the PLR requires. Included in this requirement is the time teachers need for the individual and collective reflection and dialogue that is a part of the process of using the PLR. Another challenge is to restructure current reporting structures and practices (conference schedules and reporting systems) so that there will be communication between family and school that is consistent with the conceptualization of teaching and learning that the PLR promotes. Still another challenge is how to lessen the grip of traditional standardized tests on teaching to minimize the tension between the values and goals of these different approaches to learning.

Providing Time

A most pressing issue that must be addressed in order to successfully put the PLR to use is the issue of time. Fitting the PLR in with all the other responsibilities and problems teachers are asked to handle in schools presents an ongoing challenge.

Even though few would deny that the PLR improves and supports the quality of instruction for children, most would nevertheless concur that the current structure of schools does not provide enough time to think about and do the observing, reflecting, and recording that the PLR entails. P.S. 261 has piloted strategies like reimbursement for after-school time and extra personnel to release teachers from classes during school hours to write the reports required by the *PLR*. Efforts like these should be considered by other schools.

Time for observing and recording children's growth within the daily structure of the

classroom can also be a challenge to arrange. Making this kind of time available requires a change in priorities and a shift in thinking about the teaching process. These shifts will inevitably move teachers away from the conventionally conceived role of instructors, who constantly direct behavior and dole out information, to the role of facilitators who observe students' work and thinking and use these observations to inform their teaching. They will also change the classroom environment to allow for more student autonomy, more activity and dialogue among students, and more time for teachers to be observers of children.

Finally, structures need to be built into the life of the school day, week, and year that will support time for collegial inquiry among teachers. As many teachers involved with the PLR have strongly stated, one cannot do this work in isolation. Sharing ideas with colleagues is essential because it helps teachers interpret and act on their observations of individual children. In doing this, they not only help each other develop strategies supportive of the growth of these particular children, but they also jointly construct deeper understandings of the teaching/learning process in general.

Opportunities for ongoing dialogue and collaboration will support teachers in developing a common language and shared understandings about children in the school community. Such opportunities can be provided through joint preparation periods, financial payment for lunch and after-school meetings, or more days for professional development.

Currently at P.S. 261, teachers voluntarily attend lunchtime or after-school meetings in order to share and learn from each other and the OREA assistor. While some staff-development half-days and some financial reimbursement have been obtained for a portion of these meetings, ongoing support for such opportunities, consistently structured into the life of the school, would enhance the work.

Restructuring Reporting Systems and Practices

In order to use the *Primary Language Record* effectively, a change in communication systems and practices is required. Currently, there is overlap and duplication between existing reporting structures and those called for by the PLR. The PLR suggests interviews at the beginning and end of the year with both parents and child, as well as a written narrative report in the spring. The school system, however, presently provides a late fall and an early spring conference, with graded, checklist report cards sent home at three or four intervals throughout the school year. Simultaneous participation in both systems is not only redundant, but makes impossible demands on time, a resource that is already limited.

Given the way most schools function, teachers generally need to use their own preparation periods or time before and after school in order to provide all of their students

and families with conference time. To alleviate this problem, the school's conferencing schedule will have to be redesigned to fit in with the framework offered by the PLR. One recommendation of P.S. 261 teachers is to provide an early fall conference to elicit information from parents, an early spring conference to share the written report, and a summative end-of-year conference as well.

Minimizing Tensions between the Testing System and the PLR

The barrage of tests given each year to students in the New York City public schools and many other school systems reflects views of literacy development that conflict with those that undergird the practices of the *Primary Language Record*. While the PLR values a student's growth over time in a wide variety of literacy areas, the tests make judgments of a student's progress based on performance on a multiple-choice instrument in a few hours of one day in the life of the entire school year. While the PLR assesses reading, writing, speaking, and listening in real-life, purposeful contexts, the tests assess a limited form of silent reading in isolated, esoteric paragraphs that often are far removed from the students' frame of reference. They do not evaluate oral reading, writing, speaking, or listening at all. While the PLR comments on a students' individual growth and then rates that student on a descriptive scale that is easily translatable from and to experience, the tests compare students on a numerical percentile ranking that provides little information useful to instruction or to the growth process of the student.

As the value of approaches such as the PLR becomes more widely tested and recognized, it will be important to reduce reliance on traditional standardized tests. An increasing number of states and school districts are doing so. A number have eliminated standardized testing in the primary grades entirely, and many are moving toward more authentic forms of assessment throughout the grades, using standardized tests sparingly for statistical reporting purposes and alternative forms of assessment for useful information about students and instruction. California teachers working in Chapter 1 programs have used the PLR as a basis for developing the California Learning Record, now widely used in some of the state's districts.

Rethinking Professional Development

A change in thinking about professional development grows out of and is essential to the successful implementation of the PLR. This change is one that conceptualizes

professional development as a process of teacher dialogue and reflection rather than as a body of information to be learned through workshops with staff developers. Instead of being a packaged set of teacher activities and lesson plans, this kind of professional development is an encouragement to teachers to synthesize for themselves what they observe about children, what they know about child development, and what they also know about literacy acquisition. From this frame of reference, the instrument of the PLR is really a vehicle for ongoing teacher growth that improves instruction by focusing on children. Without this perspective, the PLR could simply become another in an endless series of technical innovations that have come and gone in the world of schools, having little impact on the nature of teaching.

Another support essential to the effective use of the PLR is the presence of a knowledgeable staff developer who assists teachers by bringing them the most current resources and understandings about learning and helping them to formulate and address the many ongoing questions that arise in their work. While contact with a staff developer can never be forced or mandated, it offers teachers an opportunity to think about new things, to be exposed to new ideas, and to engage in the social process of constructing knowledge.

Ensuring Administrative Support

None of the benefits of the PLR that are being realized at P.S. 261 can happen without leadership that endorses, initiates, guides, and supports the innovation in every possible way. As Arthur Foresta has done, the school leader needs to give an innovation high profile and priority. The school leader needs to offer multiple opportunities for professional growth, in various forms and shapes, inside and outside the school community, to teachers at all stages of development.

The school leader needs to encourage a way of thinking about children, not to mandate specific behaviors or practices. The way in which the leader supports teachers will be reflected in how those teachers support children. If teachers are simply told what to do and expected to follow a script, they will make similar demands on their students. If, on the other hand, teachers are in an atmosphere permeated with respect for individual growth and development, where they are encouraged to dig down deep, ask what it means to think about children, think for themselves, try new things, and figure out new approaches, there is greater possibility that they will work with their students in the same ways. A school leader's attitude and approach to an innovation can determine whether it is simply another new technique that comes and goes or a change that profoundly affects the quality of teaching throughout the school community.

Developing Parental Support

While the PLR itself promotes and develops meaningful parent involvement in the education of each child, parent support for the kind of educational program that the PLR suggests needs to be intentionally solicited and encouraged. P.S. 261 provides a model for how to build this support into the life of the school -- through parent workshops, the distribution of educational articles, and bulletin board displays of children's authentic work, all of which offer parents the opportunity to learn more about literacy development. Reaching out to parents in these ways, together with the ongoing communication that the PLR framework suggests, contributes to creating an informed parent body that can be active on behalf of quality education.

Conclusion

The story of the *Primary Language Record*'s use at P.S. 261 provides a portrait of how changes in assessment practices can influence teaching in ways that support the growth of both children and adults. This story reveals the strengths of the PLR in the ways it can involve parents meaningfully in the education of their children, recognize the diverse strengths and knowledge that children bring with them to school, support the integrity and professionalism of teachers, and value different cultures and languages.

What stands out about this story of the use of the PLR at P.S. 261 is that it supports a new way of thinking about teaching and learning that is more important than the procedures and processes it presents. It offers a holistic framework for observing and documenting the growth of children that makes room for differences in teachers as well as in children. It enables teachers to understand better how specific children learn and thus to teach in more child-centered ways. By focusing on children's strengths, by looking at children individually, by celebrating their diversity, it supports the overall quality of instruction.

The PLR also poses a new model for professional development -- one of ongoing collegial dialogue and reflection. It offers a rich, full, and rounded picture of a child, gained through observation and documentation of the child's growth over time, as an alternative to the one-dimensional information culled from norm-referenced standardized tests.

This study of the *Primary Language Record* in use at P.S. 261 demonstrates the many benefits it can offer to teachers and schools, parents and children. How to implement it in a broad yet effective manner -- within other schools and throughout an entire district -- is the next challenge that needs to be addressed. P.S. 261's experience with the PLR provides

some insights into problems and questions that can be expected to surface. Among the challenges ahead are finding ways to support teachers at different stages of development, finding ways to make an impact on large schools, finding ways to support a shift in thinking about teaching and then about instructional practices, and finding ways to provide ongoing support for both the introduction of this innovation and its institutionalization in the school.

Each school faced with the challenge of developing teaching and assessment practices that support children's growth must find its own way, indigenous to its own culture and needs. What P.S. 261's experience has shown is that the *Primary Language Record* can provide a framework for this journey.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Suggested Parent Interview Questions

Appendix B: Suggested Student Interview Questions

Appendix C: The *Primary Language Record*

Appendix D: Observations and Samples

Appendix A

Suggested Parent Interview Questions
(developed by Jill Benado and colleagues)

1. What kind of reading does your child enjoy at home?

2. What are some of his/her favorite stories?

3. How do you think your child feels about reading in school? at home?

4. What observations have you made about the child reading at home?
   Does your child pick up books and read on his/her own?
   Does your child prefer to be read to at home?

5. What are some of your child's favorite stories or books?

6. What are some of child's favorite stories?

7. What are some of your child's special interests at home (i.e., toys, comics, TV programs, games)?

8. What are some of your child's favorite poems, songs, riddles?

9. What kind of writing and/or drawing does your child do at home?

10. Have you noticed any change in your child's language or reading since school began?

11. How is homework handled at home? Discuss routine for homework. Who helps child?

12. How do you think your child feels about homework (includes 20 minutes of being read to)?

Appendix B

Suggested Student Interview Questions
(developed by Jill Benado and colleagues)

Ask the student to bring his/her own selection of books and writing.

1. Do you enjoy reading? What does reading mean to you?

2. How do you feel about reading? What kind of a reader are you?

3. Do you remember how you learned to read? Spanish? English?

4. What kinds of books are you reading now (i.e., mysteries, stories, easy books, chapter books)?

5. What kind of books do you enjoy reading in school? at home?

6. Tell me about the books you have at home.

7. What are some of the TV programs you watch? Which do you like best?

8. Does someone read to you at home? at bedtime?

9. What is your favorite story or book? Why?

10. How often do you go to the library? Do you have a library card?

11. How do you feel about writing?

12. What does writing mean to you?

13. Tell me about the stories you write in school? at home?

14. How do you feel about the reading and writing you do here in school?

Primary Language Record

School | School Year

Name | DoB | Summer born child ☐

☐ Boy ☐ Girl

Languages understood | Languages read

Languages spoken | Languages written

Details of any aspects of hearing, vision or coordination affecting the child's language/literacy. Give the source and date of this information.

Names of staff involved with child's language and literacy development.

Part A To be completed during the Autumn Term

A1 Record of discussion between child's parent(s) and class teacher *(Handbook pages 12-13)*

Signed Parent(s) _____ Teacher _____

Date _____

A2 Record of language/literacy conference with child *(Handbook pages 14-15)*

Date _____

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Part B

To be completed during the Spring Term and to include information from all teachers currently teaching the child.

Child as a language user (one or more languages)

(Handbook pages 17-18)

Teachers should bear in mind the Authority's Equal Opportunities Policies (race, gender and class) in completing each section of the record and should refer to *Educational Opportunities for All?*, the ILEA report on special educational needs.

B1 Talking and listening

(Handbook pages 19-22)

Please comment on the child's development and use of spoken language in different social and curriculum contexts, in English and/or other community languages: evidence of talk for learning and thinking; range and variety of talk for particular purposes; experience and confidence in talking and listening with different people in different settings.

What experiences and teaching have helped/would help development in this area? Record outcomes of any discussion with head teacher, other staff, or parent(s).

B2 Reading

(Handbook pages 23-28)

Please comment on the child's progress and development as a reader in English and/or other community languages: the stage at which the child is operating (refer to the reading scales on pages 26-27); the range, quantity and variety of reading in all areas of the curriculum; the child's pleasure and involvement in story and reading, alone or with others; the range of strategies used when reading and the child's ability to reflect critically on what is read.

continued

B2 (continued)

What experiences and teaching have helped/would help development in this area? Record outcomes of any discussion with head teacher, other staff, or parent(s).

B3 Writing *(Handbook pages 29-34)*

Please comment on the child's progress and development as a writer in English and/or other community languages: the degree of confidence and independence as a writer; the range, quantity and variety of writing in all areas of the curriculum; the child's pleasure and involvement in writing both narrative and non-narrative, alone and in collaboration with others; the influence of reading on the child's writing; growing understanding of written language, its conventions and spelling.

What experiences and teaching have helped/would help development in this area? Record outcomes of any discussion with head teacher, other staff, or parent(s).

Signature of head teacher and all teachers contributing to this section of the record: _____

Part C To be completed during the Summer Term* *(Handbook page 35)*

C1 Comments on the record by child's parent(s)

C2 Record of language/literacy conference with child

C3 Information for receiving teacher

This section is to ensure that information for the receiving teacher is as up to date as possible. Please comment on changes and development in any aspect of the child's language since Part B was completed.

What experiences and teaching have helped/would help development? Record outcomes of any discussion with head teacher, other staff, or parent(s).

Signed: Parent(s) _____ Class Teacher _____

Date _____ Head Teacher _____

**To be completed by the Summer half-term for 4th year juniors.*

Observations and Samples (Primary Language Record)

attach extra pages where needed

Name: **Year Group:**

1 Talking & listening: diary of observations

The diary below is for recording examples of the child's developing use of talk for learning and for interacting with others in English and/or other community languages.

Include different kinds of talk (e.g. planning an event, solving a problem, expressing a point of view or feelings, reporting on the results of an investigation, telling a story ...)

Note the child's experience and confidence in handling social dimensions of talk (e.g. initiating a discussion, listening to another contribution, qualifying former ideas, encouraging others ...)

The matrix sets out some possible contexts for observing talk and listening. Observations made in the diary can be plotted on the matrix to record the range of social and curriculum contexts sampled.

(Handbook pages 37-39)

	SOCIAL CONTEXTS				
LEARNING CONTEXTS	pair	small group	child with adult	small/large group with adult	
collaborative reading and writing activities					
play, dramatic play, drama & storying					
environmental studies & historical research					
maths & science investigations					
design, construction, craft & art projects					

Dates	Observations and their contexts

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2 **Reading and Writing: diary of observations**
(reading and writing in English and/or other community languages)

(Handbook pages 40-44)

Date	Reading
	Record observations of the child's development as a reader (including wider experiences of story) across a range of contexts.
	Writing
	Record observations of the child's development as a writer (including stories dictated by the child) across a range of contexts.

3 **Reading Samples** (reading in English and/or other community languages)

to include reading aloud and reading silently *(Handbook pages 45-49)*

Dates			
Title or book/text (fiction or information)			
Known/unknown text			
Sampling procedure used: informal assessment/running record/miscue analysis			
Overall impression of the child's reading: • confidence and degree of independence • involvement in the book/ text • the way in which the child read the text aloud			
Strategies the child used when reading aloud: • drawing on previous experience to make sense of the book/text ⋆ **playing at reading** ⋆ **using book language** ⋆ **reading the pictures** ⋆ **focusing on print (directionality, 1:1 correspondence, recognition of certain words)** • using semantic/syntactic/ grapho-phonic cues • predicting • self-correcting • using several strategies or over-dependent on one			
Child's response to the book/text: • personal response • critical response (understanding, evaluating, appreciating wider meanings)			
What this sample shows about the child's development as a reader. **Experiences/support needed to further development.**			

⋆ *Early indicators that the child is moving into reading*

4 **Writing Samples** (writing in English and/or other community languages)

'Writing' to include children's earliest attempts at writing *(Handbook pages 50-54)*

Dates			
Context and background information about the writing: • how the writing arose • how the child went about the writing • whether the child was writing alone or with others • whether the writing was discussed with anyone while the child was working on it • kind of writing (e.g. list, letter, story, poem, personal writing, information writing) • complete piece of work/extract			
Child's own response to the writing.			
Teacher's response: • to the content of the writing • to the child's ability to handle this particular kind of writing • overall impression			
Development of spelling and conventions of writing.			
What this writing shows about the child's development as a writer: • how it fits into the range of the child's previous writing • experience/support needed to further development			

Please keep the writing with the sample sheet

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